



Rhode Island Rivers Council

One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908
www.ririvers.org



Meeting Minutes

August 14, 2013

Large Conference Room, Coastal Institute
URI Graduate School of Oceanography
URI Bay Campus, Narragansett, RI

ATTENDANCE:

A. Members Present

Guy Lefebvre, Chair
Veronica Berounsky
Rachel Calabro
James Cole
Walter Galloway
Judith Hadley
Charles Horbert
Lisa McGreavy
Elise Torello

B. Guests in Attendance

Jon Boothroyd, URI / Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA)
Linda Brunini, Kickemuit River Council
Bruce Corliss, URI Graduate School of Oceanography (URIGSO)
Annette DeSilva, NRPA
Amy Dunkle, URIGSO
Richard Grant, NRPA
Jennifer Specker, URIGSO
David Smith, NRPA
Craig Wood, NRPA

1. Call to Order and Welcome from Dean Bruce Corliss of the URI Graduate School of Oceanography

Mr. Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 4:05pm. At the invitation of the chair, meeting attendees briefly introduced themselves. The chair introduced Dr. Bruce Corliss, Dean of the URI Graduate School of Oceanography (URIGSO) who provided a warm welcome to meeting participants. He said the URIGSO had a long positive relationship working with the Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA), he was pleased to have the URI Graduate School of Oceanography host the RI Rivers Council and looked forward to upcoming projects such as the watershed sensors project being initiated as part of the Nation Science Foundation Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research which in RI is based at URIGSO. Dean Corliss mentioned he

was alumnus of URIGSO and was proud to be an oceanographer leading URIGSO. Mr. Lefebvre said that humanity should appreciate oceanographers for the vital contributions they made to the formulating the theory of plate tectonics. Dean Corliss replied that plate tectonics theory indeed transformed our understanding of the earth. The chair thanked the dean for his warm welcome.

2. Minutes Approval

A motion was made by Mr. Cole and seconded by Mr. Galloway and Ms. Torello to approve the minutes of the June 12, 2013, meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

3. National Science Foundation's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR)

Watershed Sensors Cooperative Project – DE, RI, VT – Dr. Jennifer Specker

Dr. Jennifer Specker was introduced by Dr. Veronica Berounsky. Dr. Jennifer Specker, Professor of Oceanography at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography, is principal investigator for the National Science Foundation (NSF) Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Track-2 for the term of August 1, 2013 to July 31, 2016. The specific project is the North East Water Resources Networks – Delaware, Rhode Island, Vermont (NEWRnet). The NSF seeks to build on fiber optic networks installed from 2009 to 2013. The overarching goal of NEWRnet is to improve the environmental governance and market mechanisms that sustain and/or improve water resources by linking information from a network of high frequency sensors to behavioral results for decision makers. Two defined challenges are: to understand the impact of climate variability and extreme weather events on water quality and quantity across the north-south gradient from VT to DE; and to provide valuable and rapid information to stakeholders (resource users, resource managers, and policy makers) to lead to more time efficient and more informed land and water use decision making. The research design will include a sensor network nested in watersheds in each of the three states, using the same sensors to gather and transmit high frequency hydrological and geochemical data for sharing to address hypothesis-driven questions as well as a network across all three states for experimental economics and agent-based modeling. Dr. Specker explained the RI element will focus on the Hunt River watershed and the Aquidneck Island watersheds. Involvement will include: Art Gold of the URI Water Hydrology Lab; Jameson Chace of Salve Regina University; Emi Uchida of the URI Coastal Institute Policy SimLab; Jason Dwyer, a NSF Career Awardee; Julie Whelan, a URI PhD student; and Chris Roman, a URI Oceanography Engineer. The NEWRnet vision includes transparency, data sharing, usefulness, partnership with RIDEM, and student training. Questions and answers included dialogue about the history of the watershed approach since the 1990s and the promise of this research program to advance watershed monitoring. The Rivers Council thanked Dr. Specker for her informative overview of this effort moving into the implementation phase this month.

4. Narrow River Preservation Association

Twenty Year Data Summary Project – Dr. Veronica Berounsky

Dr. Berounsky introduced Annette DeSilva, recipient of Save the Bay's 2013 Allison Walsh Award for Outstanding Environmental Advocacy for her leadership of NRPA's River Watch Program. Dr. Berounsky and Ms. DeSilva gave an overview of NRPA's Twenty Year Data Summary. The River Watch program commenced in 1992. The watershed area is 8,700 acres or 14.4 square miles and about seven miles north to south, located in Narragansett, North Kingstown and South Kingstown. Most of the river is an estuary with fresh water from streams and salt water from ocean tides. The monitoring season is May to October. Measurements are taken for temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll, bacteria and nutrients. Over twenty years, 170 volunteers put in approximately 4,200 hours and took approximately 30,000 field measurements combined with 10,000 lab analyses. The data summary focused on bacteria and nutrients. Stormwater is clearly a source of bacteria and nutrients. Pond sites in the watershed have lower bacteria levels than other sites, perhaps due to more land area for filtering. Sites close to the mouth have lower nitrogen, likely because there is less nitrogen offshore. There have been less spikes in nitrogen since 2004 midway down the estuary, perhaps due to best management practices and a bridge span increase. Some areas have been sewered without seeing a decrease in nitrogen. Other watersheds show a five to ten year period before improvements are seen. Sewers foster new development which is a long term concern for the watershed. More people yields more paved surfaces and more stormwater runoff as well as more fertilizers and pets resulting in more nitrogen input. NRPA encourages best management practices for its municipalities (e.g., detention ponds) and its citizens (e.g., rain gardens) so that immediate stormwater runoff is reduced and more water is filtered in the ground through natural processes before entering water bodies. NRPA encourages citizens to not feed wildlife, not dump such things as lawn clippings in water bodies, and to keep pet waste away from the river.

5. Local Watershed Councils' Activities Updates

NRPA President Richard Grant said his organization was proud of its forty year plus history, and he welcomed the Rivers Council to the Narrow River watershed. He pointed out that Mr. Smith set up the NRPA display near the front of the room and encouraged everyone to view it. He described a variety of NRPA programs, including one fundraiser that generated over twenty-five thousand dollars, with which an endowment was set up with the Rhode Island Foundation. He spoke very highly of NRPA board members and said he makes sure that each board member has a task to lead. He said the work of the association is more than about environmental protection, it is also about friendships that develop. Mr. Grant provided each meeting participant with a NRPA Summer 2013 eight page newsletter, *Narrow River Notes*, which contains about a dozen interesting articles, including the gubernatorial appointment and senate confirmation of NRPA board member Dr. Berounsky to the RI Rivers Council. Asked about the Narrow River running parallel to the bay, Dr. Boothroyd said that was not unusual. He also mentioned that

Southern New England's river systems before the last glaciation advance and retreat differed somewhat from today's patterns. Mr. Lefebvre said he thought possibly that the Pawtuxet River once drained to Greenwich Bay. Dr. Boothroyd agreed this drainage route was probable. Dr. Berounsky, Dr. Boothroyd, Ms. DeSilva, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Wood shared several anecdotes about NRPA. Dr. Berounsky reported on upcoming activities of NRPA: a nature photography class on August 17th and a guided tour of Garrison House Acres on September 21st. The council thanked them for their fine efforts.

Ms. Torello reported on upcoming activities of the Salt Ponds Coalition: a Salt Pond Safari on August 17th, and a Row and Glow Bioluminescent Paddle on August 23rd in conjunction with the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association. The SPC annual meeting will be held on August 19th, 5pm at the Kettle Pond Visitor Center in Charlestown.

Mr. Galloway reported on upcoming activities of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association: in addition to the Row and Glow Paddle with SPC, a Lower Wood River Paddle is planned for October 12th. Mr. Galloway also mentioned the dam at Kenyon Industries on the Pawcatuck River is being reconstructed to restore its fish passage which will allow better upstream access for migrating fish populations to spawning areas in Worden Pond.

Ms. Brunini of the Kickemuit River Council showed meeting participants an informational graphics poster describing the organization's fish passage project being done in conjunction with the Bristol County Water Authority. Ms. Brunini also commented on the ongoing popularity of the Kickemuit River Council's cookbook.

Ms. Hadley reported that the recently completed fisheries education project that the Blackstone River Watershed Council / Friends of the Blackstone conducted in five schools in Northern Rhode Island was successful. She said a River Tour at Cold Spring Park is planned for August 25th. Ms. Hadley also said she was pleased to have been able to meet US Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell on her recent visit to the Blackstone River Valley.

Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park Establishment Act Update

Mr. Lefebvre said the resolution the council passed in June supporting passage of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park Establishment Act (S371, HR706) was postal mailed at the end of June with a cover letter to Senator Jack Reed and copied to about fifteen government officials. He also noted that Representative David Cicilline on July 23rd testified in favor of HR706 before the House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation.

European Design Archimedean Screw Hydropower Generator Proposal for Natick Dam on Pawtuxet River, Warwick/West Warwick (possibly first in US)

The chair noted that Robert Cioe of Narragansett, developer of the Wickford Junction complex, has a company, JAL Hydro, that has recently received a preliminary permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to study the feasibility of installing two Archimedean screw hydropower generators in the Natick Dam on the Pawtuxet River which borders Warwick and West Warwick at that location. Mr. Lefebvre said that the Natick Dam is a sturdy twenty-two foot head granite dam that provided power to the Pawtuxet River Valley's largest mill complex which burned to the ground in a colossal fire in 1939. He said the portion of the Pawtuxet River upstream from the Natick Dam is referred to as Natick Pond. Ms. Calabro noted that the developer received a \$200,000 grant from the RI Economic Development Corporation's Renewable Energy Fund Pre-Development Feasibility Study Program. The chair said on matters of hydropower installations or dam removals, policy positions of the council have been determined on a case-by-case basis. He said one improvement to the council website could be to make it easier to link to every FERC permit that exists in the state. The web address for the Natick Dam hydropower developer is jalhydro.com.

6. RIRC FY14 Local Watershed Councils Grant Program

The chair noted the RI General Assembly, per the budget recommendation of Governor Chafee, provided level funding the RI Rivers Council in the FY14 State Budget at the amount of \$15,150. The chair said that last year, seven of the nine state designated local watershed councils, were given grants using the entire allocation. There was consensus that the council should announce this year's grant round similar to last year's grant round requesting state designated local watershed councils to submit grant applications not to exceed \$2,250 by mid-October for consideration at the November council meeting. The chair said he would complete the necessary documentation for FY13 and FY14 with the RI Department of Administration. He also said the council should seek to have the Governor's FY15 Budget include a recommendation for greater funding. He noted state funding declined, particularly in the wake of the 2008 recession years.

7. Nominating Committee Report

The committee reported they had met in the hour prior to the meeting. The committee determined that it should seek to fill the roles of chair, vice chair, and secretary, but that having a treasurer was not necessary at this time. The committee said it plans to phone all voting members and to meet again a week prior to the next regular meeting to formulate and recommend a slate of officers.

8. Beaver Population Distribution in RI

The chair noted that he recently acquired an original copy of the 2002 RIDEM Fish and Wildlife Division twelve page leaflet entitled *Beavers in Rhode Island: A Guide to History, Behavior, and Coping with Problems Associated with Beaver Activities* (Wildlife Leaflet #21) by Charles Brown. He noted previously Ms. McGreavy provided him a pdf version of the leaflet. He said the brochure says that beavers were absent from the state for one hundred fifty years. He handed out to meeting participants a photocopy of page eleven of the leaflet which shows the beaver population distribution in 1982 and 2000. In 1982, beavers only were present in NW Coventry and SW Foster. In 2000, beavers were present in most of Western Rhode Island – almost all of Burrillville, Glocester, Foster, Scituate, Coventry, West Greenwich, Exeter, Hopkinton, and parts of North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Charlestown and Westerly. At the June meeting, it was noted from a front page *Providence Journal* article that beavers are now present in Cumberland. The chair said he requested an update on the beaver population distribution at present from Ms. Catherine Sparks, RIDEM Assistant Director for Natural Resources. Mr. Horbert noted he saw a report that beavers migrated via the Branch River in Northern Rhode Island. Mr. Lefebvre said he will advise council members of the content of Ms. Sparks' response when available.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:40 pm.